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OD(SA)(82) 10th Meeting

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CABINET

DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

SUB-COMMITTEE ON THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AND
THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

MINUTES of a Meeting held at
10 Downing Street on
MONDAY 19 APRIL 1982 at 10.00 pm

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon William Whitelaw MP
Secretary of State for the
Home Department

The Rt Hon Francis Pym MP
Secretary of State for
Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

The Rt Hon John Nott MP
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Cecil Parkinson MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
and Paymaster General

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT

Admiral of the Fleet
Sir Terence Lewin
Chief of the Defence Staff

Sir Antony Acland
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Sir Ian Sinclair
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Sir Michael Palliser
Cabinet Office

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr R L Wade-Gery

SUBJECT

SITUATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

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SITUATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

Previous Reference: OD(SA)(82) 9th Meeting

The Sub-Committee had before them the texts of (a) the draft Anglo-Argentine agreement worked out between the United States Secretary of State, Mr Haig, and the Argentine Government; (b) a covering message from Mr Haig to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, dated 19 April; and (c) an American commentary. These have since been circulated as OD(SA)(82) 16. The Sub-Committee also had before them a Note by the Secretaries (OD(SA)(82) 15) on military decisions needed by 20 April.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that Mr Haig's latest proposals were disappointing, as he himself recognised. They did not, as he was suggesting, safeguard Britain's essential interests and principles in the three key areas of the withdrawal, the interim administration and the longer-term settlement. The most vital issue of all was the need, in relation to the longer term, to sustain the principle that the wishes of the Islanders were paramount. An immediate reply should therefore be sent to Mr Haig making clear that British Ministers appreciated his efforts but shared his disappointment. The reply should emphasise that Argentina was intransigently seeking to retain what she had taken by force; that the proposals were inadequate on each of the key issues; that further pressure on the Argentines would therefore be needed; and that Mr Haig should therefore return to Washington, as he had suggested, rather than divert to London. A detailed commentary should be promised urgently. It should also be made clear that the British and American Governments would need to join in countering Argentine suggestions that it was now up to Britain to accept a deal which was satisfactory to the United States as well as Argentina, and that to this end immediate press guidance was being issued in London in the following terms:

We have just received the proposals which Mr Haig has brought out of Buenos Aires. They are complex and difficult, and at first sight they do not meet the requirements strongly expressed by Parliament, particularly on the need to regard as paramount the wishes of the Islanders. We shall be studying them carefully, however, and shall be getting in touch again with Mr Haig.

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A meeting of the Cabinet was being arranged for the following afternoon, at which she herself would explain the nature of the latest proposals and the problems which they posed. Further thought should be given to the possibility of publishing both the latest draft proposals, on which a separate commentary for public consumption would then be needed, and the earlier proposals provisionally agreed between Mr Haig and the Sub-Committee on 12 April. Meanwhile Operation Paraquet, for the repossession of South Georgia, should proceed unless the Sub-Committee took a specific decision to suspend it in the course of 20 April. The British forces involved should therefore apply forthwith the Rules of Engagement appropriate to the repossession phase. So far as was consistent with their own safety they should seek to minimise Argentine casualties. The United States Government, who were well aware of the possibility should not be informed of the operation in advance. British forces on the high seas in the South Atlantic should, in the light of the increasing danger of an encounter with the Argentines, forthwith apply the revised Rules of Engagement suggested by the Ministry of Defence. Later consideration should be given to the possibility of a warning announcement.

The Sub-Committee -

1. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to send an immediate reply to Mr Haig on the lines indicated by the Prime Minister in her summing up.
2. Took note that the Prime Minister would arrange for the immediate issue of press guidance as detailed in her summing up.
3. Instructed the Secretary of the Cabinet to arrange for the preparation of a draft speaking note on Mr Haig's proposals for the Prime Minister's use at the Cabinet on 20 April.
4. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to prepare an urgent draft commentary on Mr Haig's proposals suitable for sending to him in Washington, and a separate draft commentary which might be used if the proposals were published.
5. Agreed that, unless they took a decision to the contrary in the course of 20 April, Operation Paraquet should be put into effect for the early repossession of South Georgia; that the British forces involved should apply forthwith the Rules of Engagement at Annex C to OD(SA)(82) 13; and that Mr Haig should not be informed in advance.

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6. Agreed that British forces on the high seas should apply forthwith the revised Rules of Engagement summarised in paragraph 3 of Annex A to OD(SA)(82) 15 in the case of forces which currently or in future were south of latitude 35° South and those summarised in paragraph 4 of the same Annex in the case of forces between latitudes 10° and 35° South.

7. Agreed to cancel their proposed meeting at 0915 on 2p April, but to resume their discussion on that day at 1200 (in the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's absence) and again at 1800.

Cabinet Office

20 April 1982

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